



Lafayette meeting 2-22-11
Congress House and Senate

Position Statement for the 2010 Redistricting of the Greater Lafayette Area

Lafayette Parish is one of the leading growth areas of the state according to the 2010 Census figures. The increase in growth is due largely to Lafayette's role as an economic engine for retail, health services, education, and the petroleum industry rather than population dislocations as in other areas of the state.

Lafayette is urging that the redistricting of this area of the state recognize Lafayette as the population hub of this area. As such, the redistricting approach should start with Lafayette as the population center and then expand into the neighboring parishes as additional population is needed to rebalance the various State and Congressional districts.

Congressional Redistricting

From a Congressional perspective, the 7th Congressional District shares a long history of a common culture that is linked by similar economic interests. The District honors those areas of similar interest by including Lake Charles and Lafayette as the two urban areas anchoring either end of the District. The economic corridors of Interstate 10, Interstate 49, and U.S. Hwy. 90 link the cultures, transportation hubs, education, and the petroleum extraction and refining activities in south Louisiana.


The current district also shares similar educational interests. McNeese and the University of Louisiana at Lafayette are the two higher education institutions that provide the critical professional workforce for the area. In fact, more than 63% of UL Lafayette graduates stay in the current 7th Congressional district to live and work.

We take the position that any reapportionment of the Congressional Districts should recognize the traditional boundaries of the 7th District and make as few changes as possible in the current district. While it is understood that one Congressional district must be absorbed, the redrawn district boundaries should continue to include the traditional areas of similar interests that are present within the Lafayette-to-Lake Charles corridor and the parishes bordering these economic corridors. Movement of the 7th Congressional District to absorb parts of the western portions of the 3rd Congressional District is preferable since many of the areas of interest, cultures, education, and economic activity are similar.

State Legislative Districts

While Lafayette and the surrounding parishes share a common interest in areas of Federal concerns, when it comes to local issues, there are divergent views. Lafayette has grown to become an urbanized area that is a consistent population growth leader in the state. The needs of Lafayette Parish are often different from the needs of the neighboring parishes that are more rural in nature.

Currently only three House districts and one Senate district are wholly contained in Lafayette. According to the latest Census figures Lafayette Parish is the sixth largest parish and Lafayette is the fourth largest city in the state. The current representation of only three Representatives and one Senator within Lafayette is far less than the other urbanized areas in Louisiana.



As a result, Lafayette's population is bifurcated among three other House districts and two Senate districts that have boundaries that extend into the rural parishes. One House and one Senate district covers parts of three parishes. This makes it very difficult for Lafayette to speak with a unified voice. Issues that are paramount to Lafayette become muted when those same issues are not of the same importance with the neighboring rural parishes that share the same district. In effect, the Lafayette residents in those districts are disenfranchised in the legislative process. The current district arrangement now becomes an issue of fairness in representation.

From the 2000 Census to the 2010 Census, Lafayette Parish experienced a 16.4% increase in growth. This was the seventh highest growth in the state. As such there exists the possibility of five House districts and two Senate districts being drawn entirely within Lafayette Parish. This can be done within the allowable population deviations while meeting the other redistricting criteria such as minority representation, compact and contiguous boundaries, and areas of similar interests.

The position of Lafayette Parish is that redistricting of this area should start with Lafayette Parish. The maximum number of House and Senate districts should be drawn that are wholly contained in Lafayette Parish. The 2010 census counts support such an approach within the applicable population deviations and still maintain the present minority district ratios. Only by this approach will Lafayette have a fair and equitable voice in legislative issues that are important to its residents.

Summary

By redistricting Lafayette Parish first, the resulting districts will provide representation that is more reflective of the interests of Lafayette than what is currently in place. Furthermore the outlying parishes and their districts will end up with a more homogenous population that will also make their voices and representation more effective.

We urge adoption of this redistricting approach for Lafayette Parish.



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